

LARGE GAPS BETWEEN CONSECUTIVE PRIME NUMBERS CONTAINING SQUARE-FREE NUMBERS AND PERFECT POWERS OF PRIME NUMBERS

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ABSTRACT. We prove a modification as well as an improvement of a result of K. Ford, D. R. Heath-Brown and S. Konyagin [2] concerning prime avoidance of square-free numbers and perfect powers of prime numbers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In their paper [2], K. Ford, D. R. Heath-Brown and S. Konyagin prove the existence of infinitely many “prime-avoiding” perfect k -th powers for any positive integer k .

They give the following definition of prime avoidance: an integer m is called prime avoiding with constant c , if $m + u$ is composite for all integers u satisfying¹

$$|u| \leq c \frac{\log m \log_2 m \log_4 m}{(\log_3 m)^2}.$$

In this paper, we prove the following two theorems:

Theorem 1.1. *There is a constant $c > 0$ such that there are infinitely many prime-avoiding square-free numbers with constant c .*

Theorem 1.2. *For any positive integer k , there are a constant $c = c(k) > 0$ and infinitely many perfect k -th powers of prime numbers which are prime-avoiding with constant c .*

2. PROOF OF THE THEOREM 1.1

We largely follow the proof of [2].

Lemma 2.1. *For large x and $z \leq x^{\log_3 x / (10 \log_2 x)}$, we have*

$$|\{n \leq x : P^+(n) \leq z\}| \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^5},$$

where $P^+(n)$ denotes the largest prime factor of a positive integer n .

Proof. This is Lemma 2.1 of [2] (see also [8]). □

Lemma 2.2. *Let \mathcal{R} denote any set of primes and let $a \in \{-1, 1\}$. Then, for large x , we have*

$$|\{p \leq x : p \not\equiv a \pmod{r} \ (\forall r \in \mathcal{R})\}| \ll \frac{x}{\log x} \prod_{\substack{p \in \mathcal{R} \\ p \leq x}} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right).$$

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¹We denote by $\log_2 x = \log \log x$, $\log_3 x = \log \log \log x$, and so on.

Note. Here and in the sequel p will always denote a prime number.

Proof. This is Lemma 2.2 of [2] (see also [4]). \square

Lemma 2.3. *It holds*

$$\prod_{p \leq w} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right) = \frac{e^{-\gamma}}{\log w} \left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{\log w}\right)\right), \quad (w \rightarrow +\infty),$$

where γ denotes the Euler-Mascheroni constant.

Proof. This is well known (cf. [5], p. 351). \square

Definition 2.4. *Let x be a sufficiently large number. Let also c_1 and c_2 be two positive constants, to be chosen later and set*

$$z = x^{c_1 \log_3 x / \log_2 x}, \quad y = c_2 \frac{x \log x \log_3 x}{(\log_2 x)^2}.$$

Let

$$\begin{aligned} P_1 &= \left\{p : p \leq \log x \text{ or } z < p \leq \frac{x}{4}\right\}, \\ P_2 &= \{p : \log x < p \leq z\}, \\ U_1 &= \{u \in [-y, y] : u \in \mathbb{Z}, p \mid u \text{ for at least one } p \in P_1\}, \\ U_2 &= \{u \in [-y, y] : u \notin U_1, u \notin \{-1, 0, 1\}\}, \\ U_3 &= \{u \in U_2 : |u| \text{ is a prime number}\}, \\ U_4 &= \{u \in U_2 : |u| \text{ is composed only of prime numbers } p \in P_2\}. \end{aligned}$$

Lemma 2.5. *We have*

$$U_2 = U_3 \cup U_4.$$

Proof. Assume that $u \in U_2 \setminus U_4$. Then, by Definition 2.4, there is a prime number $p_0 \notin P_2$ with $p_0 \mid |u|$. Since by Definition 2.4 we know that $u \notin U_1$, we have

$$p_0 > \frac{x}{4}.$$

Let p_1 be a prime with $p_1 \mid \frac{|u|}{p_0}$. Then

$$|u| \geq p_0 p_1 > \frac{x}{4} \log x > y.$$

Thus, p_1 does not exist and we have $|u| = p_0$ and therefore $u \in U_3$. \square

Lemma 2.6. *We have*

$$|U_4| \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^4}.$$

Proof. This follows immediately from Lemma 2.1. \square

Definition 2.7. *Let*

$$U_5 = \{u \in U_3 : p \nmid u + 1 \text{ for all } p \in P_2\}.$$

Lemma 2.8. *We can choose the constants c_1, c_2 , such that*

$$|U_5| \leq \frac{x}{3 \log x}.$$

Proof. By Lemma 2.2, we have

$$|U_5| \ll \frac{y}{\log y} \prod_{p \in P_2} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right).$$

Additionally, by Lemma 2.3, we have

$$\prod_{p \in P_2} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right) = \frac{(\log_2 x)^2}{c_1 \log x \cdot \log_3 x} \left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{\log_2 x}\right)\right).$$

Therefore,

$$|U_5| \ll \frac{c_2}{c_1} \frac{x}{\log x},$$

which proves Lemma 2.8 \square

Definition 2.9. We set

$$U_6 = U_4 \cup U_5 \cup \{-1, 0, 1\}.$$

Lemma 2.10. We have

$$|U_6| \leq \frac{x}{2 \log x}.$$

Proof. This follows from Definition 2.9 and Lemmas 2.6, 2.8. \square

Definition 2.11. Let

$$P_3 = \left\{p : \frac{x}{4} < p \leq x\right\}.$$

Let $\Phi : U_6 \rightarrow P_3$ be an injective map. Such a map Φ exists, since

$$|P_3| \geq |U_6|.$$

We denote

$$\Phi(u) = p_u.$$

We define

$$N = \prod_{p \leq \frac{x}{4}} p \prod_{u \in U_6} p_u.$$

We determine m_0 by the inequalities

$$1 \leq m_0 \leq N$$

and by the congruences:

- (1) $m_0 \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$, $(p \in P_1)$
- (2) $m_0 \equiv 1 \pmod{p}$, $(p \in P_2)$
- (3) $m_0 \equiv -u \pmod{p_u}$, $(p \in \Phi(U_6))$.

Lemma 2.12. Let $m \geq 2y$, $m \equiv m_0 \pmod{N}$. Then $m + u$ is composite for $u \in [-y, y]$.

Proof. If $u \in U_6$, then by the congruence (3) of Definition 2.11, we have

$$p_u \mid m_0 + u.$$

For $u \notin U_6$, by the definition of the sets U_1, \dots, U_5 , there is a $p \in P_1$, such that $p \mid u$ or there is a $p \in P_2$, such that $p \mid u + 1$. In both cases $p \mid m + u$, due to the congruences (1) and (2).

Thus, for all $u \in [-y, y]$ there is a prime p with $p \mid m + u$ and $p < m + u$. Hence, $m + u$ is composite for all $u \in [-y, y]$. \square

Proof of Theorem 1.1. We now consider the arithmetic progression

$$(*) \quad m = kN + m_0, \quad k \in \mathbb{N}.$$

By elementary methods (see Heath-Brown [6] for references) the arithmetic progression $(*)$ contains a square-free number

$$(1) \quad m \leq N^{3/2+\varepsilon},$$

where $\varepsilon > 0$ is arbitrarily small.

By the prime number theorem, we have

$$(2) \quad N \leq e^{x+o(x)}.$$

By Lemma 2.12, we know that $m + u$ is a composite number for $u \in [-y, y]$. By the estimates (1) and (2), we obtain

$$y \geq c \frac{\log m \log_2 m \log_4 m}{(\log_3 m)^2}$$

for a constant $c > 0$, which proves Theorem 1.1.

3. SIEVE ESTIMATES

We introduce some notations borrowed with minor modifications from [2].

Let

$$\mathcal{A} = \text{a finite set of integers}$$

$$\mathcal{P} = \text{a subset of the set of all prime numbers}.$$

For each prime $p \in \mathcal{P}$, suppose that we are given a subset $\mathcal{A}_p \subseteq \mathcal{A}$.
Let $\mathcal{A}_1 = \mathcal{A}$,

$$P(z) = \prod_{\substack{p < z \\ p \in \mathcal{P}}} p$$

and

$$S(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{P}, z) = \left| \mathcal{A} \setminus \bigcup_{p|P(z)} \mathcal{A}_p \right|.$$

Then for a positive square-free integer d composed of primes of \mathcal{P} we define:

$$\mathcal{A}_d = \bigcap_{p|d} \mathcal{A}_p.$$

We assume that there is a multiplicative function $\omega(\cdot)$, such that for any d as above

$$|\mathcal{A}_d| = \frac{\omega(d)}{d} X + R_d,$$

for some R_d , where $X = |\mathcal{A}|$.

We set

$$W(z) = \prod_{p|P(z)} \left(1 - \frac{\omega(p)}{p} \right).$$

Lemma 3.1. (BRUN'S SIEVE)

Let the notations be as above. Suppose that:

1. $|R_d| \leq \omega(d)$ for any square-free integer d composed of primes of \mathcal{P}
2. there exists a constant $A_1 \geq 1$, such that

$$0 \leq \frac{\omega(p)}{p} \leq 1 - \frac{1}{A_1}$$

3. there exist constants $\kappa > 0$ and $A_2 \geq 1$, such that

$$\sum_{w \leq p < z} \frac{\omega(p) \log p}{p} \leq \kappa \log \frac{z}{w} + A_2, \text{ if } 2 \leq w \leq z.$$

Let b be a positive integer and let λ be a real number satisfying

$$0 < \lambda e^{1+\lambda} < 1.$$

Then

$$S(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{P}, z) \leq XW(z) \left\{ 1 + 2 \frac{\lambda^{2b+1} e^{2\lambda}}{1 - \lambda^2 e^{2+2\lambda}} \exp \left((2b+3) \frac{c_1}{\lambda \log z} \right) \right\} + O \left(z^{2b + \frac{2.01}{e^{2\lambda/\kappa} - 1}} \right).$$

Proof. This is part of Theorem 6.2.5 of [1]. □

4. PRIMES IN ARITHMETIC PROGRESSIONS

The following definition is borrowed from [7].

Definition 4.1. Let us call an integer $q > 1$ a “good” modulus, if $L(s, \chi) \neq 0$ for all characters $\chi \pmod{q}$ and all $s = \sigma + it$ with

$$\sigma > 1 - \frac{C_1}{\log [q(|t| + 1)]}.$$

This definition depends on the size of $C_1 > 0$.

Lemma 4.2. There is a constant $C_1 > 0$ such that, in terms of C_1 , there exist arbitrarily large values of x for which the modulus

$$P(x) = \prod_{p < x} p$$

is good.

Proof. This is Lemma 1 of [7] □

Lemma 4.3. Let q be a good modulus. Then

$$\pi(x; q, a) \gg \frac{x}{\phi(q) \log x},$$

uniformly for $(a, q) = 1$ and $x \geq q^D$.

Here the constant D depends only on the value of C_1 in Lemma 4.2.

Proof. This result, which is due to Gallagher [3], is Lemma 2 from [7]. □

5. CONGRUENCE CONDITIONS FOR THE PRIME-AVOIDING NUMBER

Let x be a large positive number and y, z be defined as in Definition 2.4. Set

$$P(x) = \prod_{p \leq x} p.$$

We will give a system of congruences that has a single solution m_0 , with

$$0 \leq m_0 \leq P(x) - 1$$

having the property that the interval $[m_0^k - y, m_0^k + y]$ contains only few prime numbers.

Definition 5.1. *We set*

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{P}_1 &= \{p : p \leq \log x \text{ or } z < p \leq x/40k\}, \\ \mathcal{P}_2 &= \{p : \log x < p \leq z\}, \\ \mathcal{U}_1 &= \{u \in [-y, y], u \in \mathbb{Z}, p \mid u \text{ for at least one } p \in \mathcal{P}_1\}, \\ \mathcal{U}_2 &= \{u \in [-y, y] : u \notin \mathcal{U}_1\}, \\ \mathcal{U}_3 &= \{u \in [-y, y] : |u| \text{ is prime}\}, \\ \mathcal{U}_4 &= \{u \in [-y, y] : P^+(|u|) \leq z\}, \\ \mathcal{U}_5 &= \{u \in \mathcal{U}_3 : p \nmid u + 2^k - 1 \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_2\} \end{aligned}$$

Lemma 5.2. *We have*

$$\mathcal{U}_2 = \mathcal{U}_3 \cup \mathcal{U}_4.$$

Proof. This is Lemma 2.5. □

Lemma 5.3. *We have*

$$|\mathcal{U}_4| \ll \frac{x}{(\log x)^4}.$$

Proof. This is Lemma 2.6. □

Lemma 5.4. *We can choose the constants c_1, c_2 such that*

$$|\mathcal{U}_5| \leq \frac{x}{30k \log x}.$$

Proof. We have

$$\mathcal{U}_5 = \mathcal{U}_{5,1} \cup (-\mathcal{U}_{5,2})$$

with

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{U}_{5,1} &= \{u \in \mathcal{U}_3 : p \nmid u + 2^k - 1 \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_2\} \\ \mathcal{U}_{5,2} &= \{u \in \mathcal{U}_3 : p \nmid -u + 2^k - 1 \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_2\} \\ &= \{u \in \mathcal{U}_3 : p \nmid u - 2^k + 1 \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_2\}. \end{aligned}$$

We only give details for the estimate of $|\mathcal{U}_{5,1}|$, since the estimate of $|\mathcal{U}_{5,2}|$ is completely analogous.

We apply Lemma 3.1 with

$$\mathcal{A} = \{n : n \leq y\}.$$

For $p \in \mathcal{P}_1$ we define \mathcal{A}_p by

$$\mathcal{A}_p = \{n \in \mathcal{A} : n \equiv 0 \pmod{p} \text{ or } n \equiv 1 - 2^k \pmod{p}\}.$$

We check whether the conditions for the application of Lemma 3.1 are satisfied.

For $d \mid P(y)$ we set:

$$\mathcal{A}_d = \bigcap_{p \mid d} \mathcal{A}_p.$$

We partition the interval $(0, y]$ into $\lfloor y/d \rfloor$ subintervals of length d and possibly one additional interval I_{last} of length less than d .

Let $\omega(d)$ be the number of the solutions $(\bmod d)$ of the system

$$\begin{aligned} n &\equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \quad p \in \mathcal{P}_1 \cup \mathcal{P}_2 \\ (***) \quad n &\equiv 1 - 2^k \pmod{p}, \quad p \in \mathcal{P}_2. \end{aligned}$$

By the Chinese Remainder Theorem, ω is multiplicative. Each interval of d consecutive integers contains exactly $\omega(d)$ solutions of the system (**).

Thus

$$\mathcal{A}_d = \frac{\omega(d)}{d} X + R_d,$$

where $|R_d| \leq \omega(d)$.

Thus, Lemma 3.1 is applicable and we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned} |\mathcal{U}_{5,1}| &\leq S(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{P}, z) \\ &\ll y \prod_{p \leq y} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right) \prod_{\log x < p \leq z} \left(1 - \frac{2}{p}\right) \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right)^{-1}. \end{aligned}$$

Well known estimates of elementary prime number theory as in the proof of Lemma 2.8 in [2], give the result of Lemma 5.4. \square

For the next definitions and results we follow the paper [2].

Definition 5.5. Let

$$\tilde{\mathcal{P}}_3 = \begin{cases} \{p : \frac{x}{40k} < p \leq x, p \equiv 2 \pmod{3}\}, & \text{if } k \text{ is odd} \\ \{p : \frac{x}{40k} < p \leq \frac{x}{2}, p \equiv 3 \pmod{2k}\}, & \text{if } k \text{ is even,} \end{cases}$$

We now define the exceptional set \mathcal{U}_6 as follows:

For k odd we set

$$\mathcal{U}_6 = \emptyset.$$

For k even and $\delta > 0$, we set

$$\mathcal{U}_6 = \left\{ u \in [-y, y] : \left(\frac{-u}{p}\right) = 1 \text{ for at most } \frac{\delta x}{\log x} \text{ primes } p \in \tilde{\mathcal{P}}_3 \right\}.$$

We shall make use of the following result from [2].

Lemma 5.6.

$$|\mathcal{U}_6| \ll_{\varepsilon} x^{1/2+2\varepsilon}.$$

Proof. This is formula (4) from [2], where \mathcal{U}_6 is denoted by \mathcal{U}' . \square

Definition 5.7. We set

$$\mathcal{U}_7 = \mathcal{U}_4 \cup \mathcal{U}_5.$$

Lemma 5.8. We have

$$|\mathcal{U}_7| \leq \frac{x}{20k \log x}.$$

Proof. This follows from Definition 5.7 and Lemmas 5.3, 5.4 \square

We now introduce the congruence conditions, which determine the integer m_0 uniquely $(\bmod P(x))$.

Definition 5.9.

$$(C_1) \quad m_0 \equiv 1 \pmod{p}, \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_1,$$

$$(C_2) \quad m_0 \equiv 2 \pmod{p}, \text{ for } p \in \mathcal{P}_2.$$

For the introduction of the congruence conditions (C_3) we make use of Lemma 5.8. Since

$$|\tilde{\mathcal{P}}_3| \geq |\mathcal{U}_7|,$$

there is an injective mapping

$$\Phi : \mathcal{U}_4 \rightarrow \tilde{\mathcal{P}}_3, \quad u \rightarrow \mathcal{P}_u.$$

We set

$$\mathcal{P}_3 = \Phi(\mathcal{U}_4).$$

For all u , for which the congruence

$$m^k \equiv -(u-1) \pmod{p_u}$$

is solvable, choose a solution m_u of this congruence.

The set (C_3) of congruences is then defined by

$$(C_3) \quad m_0 \equiv m_u \pmod{p_u}, \quad p_u \in \mathcal{P}_3.$$

Let

$$\mathcal{P}_4 = \{p \in [0, x) : p \notin \mathcal{P}_1 \cup \mathcal{P}_2 \cup \mathcal{P}_3\}.$$

The set of congruences is then defined by

$$(C_4) \quad m_0 \equiv 1 \pmod{p}, \quad p \in \mathcal{P}_4.$$

Lemma 5.10. *The congruence systems $(C_1) - (C_4)$ and the condition $1 \leq m_0 \leq P(x) - 1$ determine m_0 uniquely. We have $(m_0, P(x)) = 1$.*

Proof. The uniqueness follows from the Chinese Remainder Theorem. The coprimality follows, since by the definition of $(C_1) - (C_4)$ m_0 is coprime to all p , with $0 < p \leq x$. \square

Lemma 5.11. *Let $m \equiv m_0 \pmod{P(x)}$. Then $(m, P(x)) = 1$ and the number*

$$m^k + (u-1)$$

is composite for all $u \in [-y, y] \setminus \mathcal{U}_6$.

Proof. For $u \in \mathcal{U}_1$, there is $p \in \mathcal{P}_1$ with $p \mid u$. Therefore, since by Definition 5.9, the system (C_1) implies that $m_0 \equiv 1 \pmod{p}$, we have

$$m^k + (u-1) \equiv m_0^k + (u-1) \equiv 1 + u - 1 \equiv u \equiv 0 \pmod{p},$$

i.e.

$$p \mid m^k + (u-1).$$

For $u \in \mathcal{U}_3, u \notin \mathcal{U}_5$, there is $p \in \mathcal{P}_2$ with $p \mid u + 2^k - 1$.

Since by (C_2) $m_0 \equiv 2 \pmod{p}$, we have

$$m_0^k + (u-1) \equiv 2^k - 2^k \equiv 0 \pmod{p},$$

i.e.

$$p \mid m^k + (u-1).$$

The remaining cases, except $u \in \mathcal{U}_6$, are checked similarly. \square

6. CONCLUSION OF THE PROOF OF THEOREM 1.2

Let now x be such that $P(x)$ is a good modulus in the sense of Definition 4.1. By Lemma 4.2, there are arbitrarily large such elements x . Let D be a sufficiently large positive integer. Let \mathcal{M} be the matrix with $P(x)^{D-1}$ rows and $U = 2\lfloor y \rfloor + 1$ columns, with the r, u element being

$$a_{r,u} = (m + rP(x))^k + u - 1,$$

where $1 \leq r \leq P(x)^{D-1}$ and $-y \leq u \leq y$.

Let $N(x, k)$ be the number of perfect k -th powers of primes in the column

$$\mathcal{C}_1 = \{a_{r,1} : 1 \leq r \leq P(x)^{D-1}\}.$$

Since $P(x)$ is a good modulus, we have by Lemma 4.2 that

$$(5.1) \quad N_0(x, k) \geq C_0(k) \frac{P(x)^{D-1}}{\log(P(x)^{D-1})}.$$

Let \mathcal{R}_1 be the set of rows R_1 , in which these primes appear. We now give an upper bound for the number N_1 of rows $R_r \in \mathcal{R}_1$, which contain primes.

We observe that for all other rows $R_r \in \mathcal{R}_1$, the element

$$a_{r,1} = (m_0 + rP(x))^k$$

is a prime avoiding k -th power of the prime $m_0 + rP(x)$.

Lemma 6.1. *For sufficiently small c_2 , we have*

$$N_1 \leq \frac{1}{2} N_0(x, k).$$

Proof. For all v with $v - 1 \in \mathcal{U}_6$, let

$$T(v) = \{r : 1 \leq r \leq P(x)^{D-1}, m_0 + rP(x) \text{ and } (m_0 + rP(x))^k + v - 1 \text{ are primes}\}.$$

We have

$$(5.2) \quad N_1 \leq \sum_{v \in \mathcal{U}_6} T(v).$$

For the estimate of $T(v)$ we apply again Lemma 3.1.

We set

$$g(r) = m_0 + rP(x)$$

$$h(r) = (m_0 + rP(x))^k + v - 1$$

$$\mathcal{A} = \{g(r)h(r) : 1 \leq r \leq P(x)^{D-1}\},$$

$$\mathcal{A}_p = \{n \in \mathcal{A} : n \equiv 0 \pmod{p}\}, \text{ for each prime } p \text{ with } x < p \leq P(x).$$

We let $\omega(p)$ be the number of solutions of the congruence

$$g(r)h(r) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \text{ for } p > x.$$

Since $p \nmid P(x)$, the linear congruence

$$g(r) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$$

has exactly one solution.

Let

$$\rho(p) = |\{n \pmod{p} : n^k + v - 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{p}\}|.$$

Then the congruence

$$h(r) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$$

has $\rho(p)$ solutions $(\bmod p)$.

By Lemma 3.1, we have:

$$(5.3) \quad T(v) \leq S(\mathcal{A}, \mathcal{P}, P(x)) \ll P(x)^{D-1} \prod_{x < p \leq P(x)} \left(1 - \frac{1}{p}\right) \prod_{x < p \leq P(x)} \left(1 - \frac{\rho(p)}{p}\right).$$

By Lemma 3.1 of [2], we have

$$\prod_{x < p \leq P(x)} \left(1 - \frac{\rho(p)}{p}\right) \ll_{k, \varepsilon} |v|^\varepsilon \frac{\log x}{\log P(x)}.$$

Lemma 6.1 now follows from (5.2), (5.3) and the bound for $|\mathcal{U}_6|$.

This completes the proof of Theorem 1.2. \square

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